

cause it stresses the more recent period and because it throws into sharp focus the increasing fragmentation of the American people in the twentieth century into self-conscious racial groups, a process that seemed to deny the existence of a melting pot. As might be hardly understandable except in terms of day, progressivism is scarcely comprehensible without an examination of its leading ideological competitors. Unfortunately there is still no good work on American conservatism in the twentieth century. But the Socialist movement has been the subject of three recent worthwhile books: Ira Kipnis, *The American Socialist Movement, 1897-1912* (New York, 1952), Howard H. Quint, *The Forging of American Socialism: Origins of the Modern Movement* (Columbia, S. C., 1953) and David A. Shannon, *The Socialist Party of America: A History* (New York, 1955). Quint's book carries the story only until 1901 but is of interest to the student of progressivism because of its thesis that American socialism rose more in response to American conditions and thought than to the impact of European radical and Marxian doctrines. Shannon's volume, which covers the period from 1901 to 1952, is scholarly and objective but contains little interpretation. Kipnis writes from the viewpoint of the left wing of the party, is very critical of the lack of democracy, the chauvinism, and the race consciousness of the majority, and concludes that the opportunism and the lack of principle of the majority was responsible for the decline of American socialism.

#### LOCAL AND STATE STUDIES

Directly centered upon progressivism are a number of recent local and state studies that have contributed greatly to our understanding of the movement. There is still much work to be done before the urban roots of progressivism are dug out of local municipal reform efforts. But Walton Bean, *Boss Reuf's San Francisco: The Story of the Union Labor Party, Big Business and the Graft Prosecution* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1952) makes a brilliant start. Although the book is centered upon the prosecution of Reuf and his boodling Labor party colleagues, the volume clearly analyzes the forces that combined in San Francisco to challenge the corrupt hold

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*Publication Number 10*

*908*  
*849.5*  
*Mc. 10*  
*1958*

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Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 58-6045

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# THE PROGRESSIVE MOVEMENT, 1900-1920: RECENT IDEAS AND NEW LITERATURE

*By George E. Mowry*

## THE PROGRESSIVE MOVEMENT

Historians designate the widespread political and social reform activities covering the period from the end of the Spanish-American War to or through the First World War as the progressive movement. Starting in Midwest cities and states, it spread geographically to both the east and west coasts and by 1910 was nationwide. Its impulse was felt in the farm communities of Iowa and Wisconsin, in the great urban centers of New York, Cleveland, Chicago, and San Francisco, in purely southern states like Georgia, and in such widely differentiated commonwealths as Maine and California. Starting on the more local levels, the reform crusade made its way upward in the political structure to the level of the state capitals and then finally to the national government. On the local municipal level the movement comprehended such reform crusades as those of Mayor Seth Low of New York against Tammany, of Tom Johnson and Golden Rule Jones in Cleveland and Toledo, Ohio, the fight against the Union Labor Party machine in San Francisco, and the struggle of the "good government" leagues in Los Angeles. It included also Jacob Riis' work with the immigrants in the New York tenement districts, Jane Addams' creation of Hull House in Chicago, and Judge Ben Lindsay's campaign for the juvenile court in Denver.

The reform crusades of Governors Robert LaFollette in Wisconsin, Albert B. Cummins in Iowa, Charles Evans Hughes in New York, Woodrow Wilson in New Jersey, Hiram Johnson in California, Hoke Smith in Georgia, and Jeff Davis in Arkansas were all varied manifestations of the progressive impulse on the state level. The movement became a national one under President Theodore Roosevelt and extended itself through the administrations of his two successors, the Republican William Howard Taft and the Democrat Woodrow Wilson.

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The immediate ends of the progressive movement were as varied as its centers of activity. In the cities its more proximate purposes were the overthrow of boss rule through the institution of such new political devices as the direct primary and the nonpartisan political ticket, and such new schemes of city government as the city manager plan and the commission form. Wider aims included the abolition of franchise politics which under the corrupt bosses had resulted in inefficient, inadequate, and costly city utilities, organized prostitution, a lawless liquor trade, and general corruption and venality. But an even more comprehensive aim of the municipal movement was to make the twentieth-century American city a decent, healthy, and enjoyable place in which to live. This meant the abolition of slums and tenements, the abatement of crime, juvenile delinquency, and disease, the creation of parks, playgrounds, and efficient social services.

On the state level the progressive movement concerned itself also with democratic political devices mentioned above; but it was even more interested in such economic issues as the regulation of railroads and monopolies, the adjustment of tax systems so that corporations would be forced to bear their fair share of the costs of government, and in such diverse causes as civil service, the conservation of natural resources, and the protection of women and children, both at home and at work. Nationally the progressive aspirations ranged through an even wider spectrum of causes, but at the heart of the movement was the central question of what to do with the great interstate organizations of capital and labor, known to the day as trusts and unions. Both types of organizations had vastly augmented their economic power until they were national in scope, and by the first decade of the twentieth century they were engaged in a bitter battle for supremacy. A major question raised by the government was how the corporations and the unions were to be protected from each other, but more important, how the general public and the individual were to be protected from each. The national regulation of railroads, the attempt to dissolve monopolistic corporations, the conservation movement, the setting of tariff rates, the pure food laws, the campaign for an income tax, and the government intervention in labor disputes were all phases of the general query: how were the nation's historic values of individual-

ism and equality to be preserved in the new twentieth-century collective world of highly organized industry, highly organized labor, and the highly organized city.

### THE OLD INTERPRETATIONS

Since without change there would be no history, historians have always been fascinated by the question of why and how societies move. Soon after the progressive movement started, historians tried to explain why the nation, apparently devoted to McKinley conservatism, suddenly went on a reforming binge that was to dominate both great political parties at all levels of national life and was to last for almost two decades. Up until the end of the Second World War the causes of the progressive movement, as well as its meaning and significance, were largely interpreted by historians writing from a rather distinct political approach and from a middle western viewpoint. Their conclusions were that the progressive movement was little more than an extension of the Populist crusade of the 1880's and 1890's which reached its climax and failed in the defeat of William Jennings Bryan and the Democratic party in 1896. Submerged for a while by the Spanish-American War and imperialism, the argument ran, the Populist spirit broke out again after 1900, and under new Republican leaders was successful in achieving in the new century most of the Populist reform proposals.

As one of the midwestern participants in the progressive crusade, William Allen White, phrased it, the Republican progressives "caught the Populists in swimming and stole all their clothing except the frayed underdrawers of free silver." Because of the movement's assumed origins, according to this older interpretation, progressivism was motivated by the same forces that motivated populism. It was devoted to the agrarian principles of a provincial, individualistic, equalitarian, but capitalistic democracy; it drew its chief support from the farmer and the small merchant; its enemies were the giant corporations and eastern financiers who were busy transforming the country into one great factory in which a few industrial and financial bosses held the rest of the nation in poverty and subjection.

Where the agricultural Midwest alone was concerned, this older

interpretation was not too unsatisfactory. As John D. Hicks in *The Populist Revolt* has pointed out, practically every major Populist-sponsored reform, except that of free silver, was passed in the progressive period. But to the younger generation of postwar scholars it has been obvious that when this interpretation was applied nationally to the progressive movement serious questions arose. Why, they asked, should the Populist reform movement have failed during the depression days of the nineties and its extension, the progressive movement, have succeeded in the prosperous first decade of the twentieth century? The Populist movement even in the Midwest had been strongest in the western part of the region in the more distressed wheat growing states of Kansas, Nebraska, and the Dakotas, whereas progressivism got its start and waxed stronger in the more prosperous states of Wisconsin and Iowa. The questions arose of why large sections of the middle-class, conservative Republican party that fought Bryan and the radical Populists so bitterly in 1896 should have accepted such doctrines just ten years later, and why the large cities that had been against Bryan should now accept his agrarian principles. When the leadership of the Populist and the progressive movements were compared, more paradoxes appeared. For instead of being favorable to populism the great majority of progressive leaders had been opposed both to Bryan and to the Populist principles. Progressive Republican leaders usually had been McKinley Republicans in the nineties, progressive Democrats usually anti-Bryanites. Moreover, the progressive crusade was supported by so many wealthy men that it has been sometimes referred to as the millionaire's reform movement. This fact, obviously, was difficult to reconcile with the Populist's well known bias against great wealth.

The vexing questions which the older studies of progressivism left unsatisfied impelled many postwar historians to study the movement more intensively and from a great many more viewpoints than had the preceding generations of scholars. Aiding these newer historians greatly was the expansion of historical research into the new fields of intellectual, cultural, religious, and immigration history. The result was a spate of works on the progressive period which in their total have radically changed the basic historical interpretations of the period.

## ALLIED RESEARCH

Aiding the historians more directly centered on progressive politics were a number of scholars working in tangential but closely allied fields. Among the most important of such ancillary works were those produced in the area of what is known generally as intellectual history. Comprehensive and historical in its coverage of the life of the mind is Henry Commager, *The American Mind: An Interpretation of American Thought and Character Since the 1880's* (New Haven, 1950). Although relatively derivative in character, Commager's volume is extremely useful because of its almost encyclopedic coverage of the early twentieth-century intellectual trends in a great diversity of fields. For the intellectual background of progressivism, Morton G. White, *Social Thought in America: The Revolt Against Formalism* (New York, 1949) should also be consulted. Brilliant and creative, the work attempts to trace the evolution of social thought in America through the examination of the ideas of such seminal minds as those of Justice Holmes, John Dewey, Thorstein Veblen, and Charles Beard. It is especially excellent in estimating the impact of pragmatism and relativism on American thinking in its change away from the old rigid nineteenth-century formulations.

The long neglected field of American religion has produced several works of great value to the understanding of the progressive period. Charles H. Hopkins, *The Rise of the Social Gospel in American Protestantism, 1860-1915* (New Haven, 1940) and Henry F. May, *Protestant Churches and Industrial America* (New York, 1949) both chronicle the breakdown of religious fundamentalism and the rise of a secular reforming spirit in American protestantism, a spirit that was so evident in progressivism. Of great worth to the understanding of the racial intergroup tensions characterizing the first decades of the twentieth century and giving progressivism distinctive elements that operated in both the fields of domestic and foreign policy are two recent works on immigration, Oscar Handlin, *The Uprooted: The Epic Study of the Great Migrations that Made the American People* (Boston, 1951) and John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* (New Brunswick, N. J., 1955). Higham's book is particularly useful be-